RW: This is an oral history. I’m Reed Williams, today is April 6, 1977. I’m going to interview Blaine Yorgason and the general topic will be the Teton Flood. Mr. Yorgason well you please spell your name for this.

BY: Y-O-R-G-A-S-O-N.

RW: Where were you born?

BY: Sandpete County Utah.

RW: How long have you lived in the general area?

BY: Seven years.

RW: Blaine can you tell me where you were at when you first heard about the dam, breaking or crumbling?

BY: I was laying in my hammock in my backyard.

RW: What were your thoughts?

BY: Well my neighbor yelled across and told me to get my boat out, the dam had just broken, and we laughed. I just layed there.

RW: In other words you didn’t really think the water was going to get…

BY: I didn’t think the dam had broken at first.

RW: You thought it was a joke…

BY: I thought he was joking.

RW: How did you find out that he wasn’t joking, that the dam really had broken?

BY: A half an hour later he yelled over again, he said he had just heard it on the radio. So I got up and went into the house and turned on the radio and I didn’t hear anything. So I changed stations two or three times. So I went in and I told Kathy, that Bill had said the dam had broken. She said no it can’t, I said I’ve been listening and just then the radio announcer broke into a song. And said this is an emergency warning. The dam has broken, everybody get out. Panic on the radio, that’s what it was.

RW: About what time was that?

BY: Oh eleven or eleven-thirty.

RW: When the main dam broke?
BY: Ah-huh.

RW: What did you do then, did you just get up and leave or…

BY: Well we rounded up the kids; put the lawn mower away in the shed. We got in the car and drove up the hill, cause he kept screaming, everybody out don’t take anything, run get up there. So we did it. We got up there and there wasn’t any water anywhere in sight. So I drove back down again, and got some baby diapers, and some milk. Then we went back up again, sat around. There was still no water. So I drove back down again. I went downstairs, grabbed the kids book off the bottom shelf in the basement. I had lots and lots of books, about three thousand of them, but I just grabbed the bottom shelf, and took them upstairs. I figured if we got any water in the basement at all it wouldn’t be more than about six inches. So I was just kind of clearing the bottom shelves out, just in case. I grabbed the sleeping bags and put them in the car. I went back up on the hill, still no water, I could see it way off in the distance, but nothing close to Rexburg. So I went back down again and got some food. I moved a few more things. I took my wife’s sewing machine upstairs and left my new electric typewriter sitting downstairs, right beside it. I tried to close all the windows, close the doors, and went out. My neighbor came over and asked me if I wanted him to take my camper trailer up on the hill and I didn’t have a trailer hitch, I’d just bought a new car. I said oh I don’t know. He said ah let me take it, it won’t hurt anything. I said ok, I said I won’t need it. Ended up that’s all I had to live in for the next eight weeks. He came over and loaded that thing up, and took it up on the hill and parked it. I got a five gallon can and filled it with water. Took a bunch of water and some food, and whatever I could get. I thought we would probably be up there overnight. Cause our house was on just a little hill. I thought, in fact the radio said we could expect six to eight inches on Second South.

RW: You live on Second South.

BY: Ah-huh.

RW: You said you were expecting about six inches of water—how deep did the water get at your house?

BY: Five feet.

RW: That’s a little more than six inches.

BY: Yeah.

RW: You were shuffling up on the hill; by the hill do you mean Ricks College?

BY: Yeah up at Ricks College in the parking lot south of Manwaring Center, that’s where we put the trailer. Stayed there for about three days, and then we moved it back into our driveway.
RW: So did you live in your trailer then for the time you were out of the house?

BY: Yes, we sent our children to Utah, and they were in Utah for about six months.

RW: When you were moving these things up—you mentioned that you thought that there would be six to eight inches of water. Was there anything else that went through your mind as to what else to get out of your house?

BY: I wondered a lot about what to do with my food storage, which was all downstairs, but I didn’t feel like I had time to get it. I worried a lot about that. I worried about….., I had a bunch of paintings down there. That I had done for people. I actually only took two paintings upstairs. That was the portraits of my wife and I. The rest of them I just left there, I really didn’t know what to do with them if I took them up. So I then wondered about my books. There were a few really valuable ones, three or four hundred years old books that I took up. But the majority of them the ones that were painted in the early eighteen hundreds, and late eighteen hundreds, I left there. I just didn’t feel like I had time to do it.

RW: How much time did you have from the time you first heard it?

BY: About three hours. The last time I left the water was coming across the park. Just to the north of me, it was about fifty yards away. And it was coming in a wall, of two and a half to three feet high, right across the park.

RW: Was there anything on the lead edge of that wall of water?

BY: Just a bunch of junk, there was logs, and cans, paper, and stuff like that. What it looked like was a bunch of debris rolling across the park and dirt. It was just filthy, dusty.

RW: It was kicking up quite a dust?

BY: Not a lot of dust in the park, but it was kicking dust up, I noticed on the road where it was coming along. As I drove down the streets.

RW: Was there any sound to it?

BY: I don’t remember.

RW: You don’t remember that…

BY: That I heard anything.

RW: Now did you have one place up there where you put your family, and left them?
BY: Yeah we just stayed there with the trailer; we occasionally walked down to the edge of the water, that afternoon and looked. We watched it filling up a guy’s basement. I thought boy I’m glad that’s not happening to my house.

RW: But did it?

BY: Oh yeah.

RW: Fill up your basement?

BY: And the upstairs.

RW: And your upstairs. Then it pretty much demolished your house then?

BY: Well we had to rebuild it.

RW: Blaine, you mentioned that you had these books and of course they would be almost priceless. Did you get any family pictures or any of your family records?

BY: For some reason, we had moved all of our family records upstairs, the week before. We had taken them up there for some reason or the other, and left them there, they were upstairs out of the reach of the water. Water got up to six or eight inches of them but then it stopped.

RW: Did any of your records or any of your pictures get wet?

BY: I did have some family records over here at the seminary. And I did have a lot of my historical genealogical research downstairs, in a file cabinet. And I lost all that, but the historical genealogical research I’d compiled a book about, was saved. I had, just the week before been setting there looking at the manuscript which was about six hundred and fifty pages, and I thought, I should take that up to the college. I didn’t even really think about it. I just picked it up and got out in the car and drove up to the college, and said would you guys keep this for me. They said sure for a little while. I was going to have it printed up there at the press. I just hadn’t decided when yet. So I took it up there and they kept it. Otherwise that would have been here in the seminary. The seminary got nine feet of water in here.

RW: We are sitting in the seminary now and you say it got nine feet of water. So it was pretty well—all the carpets…

BY: Everything, walls, everything was shot.

RW: It looks like they’ve done a good job of redoing it.

BY: Yeah it had to be completely restored. New doors, new windows, repainted all the walls. The walls were cinder block and that helped. But all the woodworking, the
cabinets had to be repaired or replaced. So there was a lot of changes here in the seminary. This is where I had most of my personal and private papers and I lost all of them. I lost the manuscripts to three books I had written that were in preparation for publication. So those were lost but not the genealogy.

RW: So you did get the genealogy books out?

BY: Yes.

RW: What did your boys think of the flood, what was their feelings about it?

BY: I don’t remember a lot about it, they were excited to go down and watch the water. They wanted to go see our house. To see what it had done to it, but we couldn’t get to our house that night. I don’t remember much other than that.

RW: You don’t remember if...

BY: They left really early the next morning. One of my friends, another seminary teacher, came up from Idaho Falls. In fact two of them did. They came up that morning about six-thirty. They picked up the kids, all of them and took them to Idaho Falls. Then my mother and father-in-law drove up from Utah and picked them up at Idaho Falls and took them home. So other than that I don’t remember. They weren’t around long enough to make very many comments about it. They were in Utah. We occasionally got to talk to them on the telephone, after phone service was restored. They wanted to know what it was like but they didn’t say much about it.

RW: Well, how long was it before you could get back to your house?

BY: I got back down to the house Sunday morning, about eight-thirty, seven-thirty, eight-thirty, something like that.

RW: Sunday, that would have been the seventh, or the sixth?

BY: Let’s see, the sixth.

RW: Seeing your house, what condition was it in when you went back? Did it look like it was…you didn’t have any logs through it?

BY: No, we had some logs that went down the driveway. That could have gone through it. Our neighbor’s house had a log go through it and it looked like a bomb had hit it. But our home still sitting there. I was really disappointed, when I saw the mess it was in. I almost wished, in fact I spent a lot of the summer wishing it had gone, so that we could just start over. Instead of trying to rebuild, because that rebuilding was a lot more laborious, because we had to spend a lot more time cleaning up first. But it was good it didn’t, because we had something to start with anyway.
RW: When you went back and your house was sitting there, what did you think, and did you have any feelings about that?

BY: No not really. At the time I think I as more in shock than anything else. I don’t…I remember walking through the house, it was mud. I mean upstairs, I walked through and the carpets would squish and I’d leave footprints in them, because it was about three inches of just solid mud, on the carpets. That water was gone, but it was just ooze three inches of mud. I walked through all that mud and I thought how am I ever going to get all this mud out of here. I remember thinking that. Then as I went over to the stairwell and looked down into the basement, the water level had dropped about a foot, in the basement. But it was still, not less or more than six inches from the ceiling of the basement. It had been higher that the basement ceiling. It had come way above floor level. Maybe it had dropped more than that. Maybe it had dropped eighteen inches, totally from the height in had finally gotten. But I remember looking in the basement and thinking oh my heavens. I went out in back and kicked open a window. I kicked it out, and immediately water poured out, through the window. That emptied the basement do to the level of the bottom of the windows. It was kind of a interesting feeling kicking your windows out, and looking at everything that’s nothing anymore.

RW: And thinking about it?

BY: Yeah.

RW: You mentioned you had some paintings down in the basement. Did you…I know you kept a pictoral [picture] record as far as you could of the paintings you’ve done. Did you happen to get that out?

BY: That was with my family records, that were somehow upstairs, my pictoral [picture] record of my paintings. But I didn’t have pictures of those paintings yet.

RW: The ones that was downstairs?

BY: Yeah the ones that was downstairs. They were the ones I had just finished or was in the process of varnishing or one thing or another, just completing them. They were paintings I had spent all spring working on and I just didn’t get them. Of course I paint on Masonite. The Masonite in the water swelled up and warped, just kind of disintegrated, because it sat under the water. If I’d been able to swim down in and pull them out, that afternoon or sometime Sunday. If I’d thought about it I might [or] could have saved them, but that was something that didn’t even enter my mind that day, was to get down in there and save anything. Because I could see how much water there was and I know what I was going to find. I had something else down there with my pictures. I had just completed a painting for a man of a big bull elk. He had shot an elk up on the dry farms and he had lent me the antlers, and they were a seven-point, rack of record class and they were a beautiful rack. I had left them sitting in the basement. When we finally got down to them the water had soaked into them and they had exploded. They
split all to pieces, from the water. He was quite unhappy, that I had lost his antlers in the
flood. He was really unhappy.

RW: You mentioned by the time you got down there. How long did it take you to finally
get the water out of your basement?

BY: We started pumping the water out of our basement Monday. By Monday the water
level had dropped to about five and half feet, in the basement. I guess it was slowly
seeping out through the sewer, and so on. I waded down into the basement sometime
Monday. I don’t remember what time of day it was. I remember wading along kind of
standing on my tip toes to keep my shin out of the water. So that I wouldn’t submerge. I
stumbled around there was a lot of stuff all over the floor, you had to walk slow. We
walked in and broke out another window. My neighbor came over and we stuck a pump
down through it. We started pumping on Monday. We pumped from Monday off and on
until, oh it seems like it was Wednesday night until we had all the water out. Then it took
us until Saturday or even the following Monday until we had all the mud shoveled out.
In the process of that we had to tear out the walls. We had a lot of the walls already torn
out. The flood tore out a lot of walls, I was surprised at that. For instance our boys’ bunk
bed smashed through one wall. It went clear through it the wall was just left dangling
there. The freezer smashed through a wall, and left if just kind of dangling. And our
washing machine smashed through a wall. So there were three walls just hanging loose,
down there in the basement so those weren’t too hard to tear out. The hardest part was,
we spent a full day just hauling food out of the storage room, no good stuff. It stunk, we
had a lot of wheat in there, and a lot of grains of various kinds and they had fermented.
By the time we got to it and that was about on Friday. We broke open the door, finally to
the storage room and boy it smelled like someone had been in there on a cheap drunk, for
a week. It was really potent in there.

RW: Let’s get into the cleanup now, you started on it on Monday following, you started
getting the water out.

BY: Well Sunday actually we did some cleanup upstairs. Another one of my neighbors
came over on Sunday and he and I started shoveling, with the scoop shovels, the mud out
of upstairs. Just pushing it like you’d push dirt or something. We scooped a lot of it out.
His upstairs didn’t get wet so he was over helping me get mine. Then once we got the
mud out, and actually on Sunday afternoon he and I stripped out all the carpeting from
upstairs. I can’t even remember what we did with the furniture that was upstairs. A lot
of it was no good; I guess we just chucked it outside. It was hard to get used to the idea
that we had to throw everything away. For the first four or five days every single thing
we picked up and worried with it for a few minutes. Thinking can we save this or can’t
we? But then after four or five days no matter what we picked up rather it was savable or
not, we were so sick at looking at the stuff that we said we don’t want to save it. And we
chucked it. It wasn’t worth it mentally it was emotional thing more than anything else.
But I remember the feeling as we stuck that knife in our new upstairs carpet. Because we
couldn’t move the whole thing, it was too heavy. I had to cut it up into chunks. Just rip it
with that knife he had brought over. So we ripped that into chunks and dragged it out,
and piled it out in the street. Up and down the street people were starting to do that a little. On Sunday there wasn’t a lot of that going on. So we did get that out of our upstairs. That’s probably what saved…we had hardwood floors underneath the carpeting. The only room we didn’t take the covering out was the kitchen and if we had done we wouldn’t have had to put a new floor in the kitchen. We eventually did, because we didn’t take the kitchen linoleum out. The other room in the house we saved because we got the stuff off.

RW: When you started with this upstairs cleaning, you said that you would look at something and worry if you save it or not. With that much mud in there was it really caked on?

BY: At that point it was slimy; it was very wet no drying had occurred at all, by Sunday. It was just wet and slimy, and we would take it outside and set it somewhere and we can get to it in another day or two when we are all done in here, we can wash it off. I really had no concept of how much time it was going to take. I thought oh my golly; this is going to take at least a week.

RW: You say you thought it would take at least a week. How long did it take to clean up?

BY: We cleaned up for three weeks.

RW: That’s just in your house?

BY: Yeah that’s just in our house. That included spraying with disinfectant, and everything. But it was three weeks (?) that we everyday on cleaning up. We had people coming and helping us too. My family came up from Utah, and two friends I had that were seminary teachers in Idaho Falls. Jerry Jecks and Kendall Jensen and spent everyday for a week.

RW: When these groups came into Rexburg to help clean up, did you have any of those come down and help you?

BY: A little, but I was in the Bishopric and that meant my job was to help them to go to other people. So after the first two weeks when we were pretty much on our own, that was when the groups started to come in was after about two weeks. So then I didn’t get to stay at home hardly at all. I spent all day over at the church with the Bishop and the other counselor just distributing these people around the ward. I just really never did get a chance to use them, I remember when two guys stopped by and worked on my lawnmower, but they were just going from house to house. I remember another time a man went over to our house just as we were starting to paint our kitchen. He said I’m a professional painter, so he stayed there and painted all day long. I remember a lady that came in, she was working down the street and she saw my wife outside scrubbing bottles or something. So she came over, she came two days and worked with my wife. Cleaning up bottles and trying to get food back into them, because we could save our canned food,
but not the bottle of food, but the cans of food we saved. We did have to throw some of them away later because they must not have been air tight. But most of them we did save. So those are about the only people that I ever got that came with the church. I had some friends that came up with a church group but they came up specifically to help us. They were from Rupert, they came up and helped me fix my fence and do other things like that. Then my family came up.

RW: In the aftermath, you said you were in shock, but do you recall how much debris was left in your yard?

BY: Three dump truck loads.

RW: Now was that just trees?

BY: There were a few trees, I had lots of tires from the tire store and lot of ladies’ under clothes that came from the clothing store, and lots stuff pills and other stuff that came from Johnson’s Drug. Then just hunks of wood and things like that. Really lots and lots of strange kind of debris. We had a park picnic table sitting on top of our bushes. Our yard has a large wooden fence and a shed back in the back. It acted like a big whirlpool, it caught everything that went past, it just stayed in that circle. We really had an unreal amount of stuff. I picked up out of our bushes a bic lighter, that had come floating in from somewhere, I flicked it and it came right on. I was really impressed.

RW: The total time on clean up was about how long?

BY: It was about three weeks, that we spent totally. I spent in our basement, we had got everything out and the walls stripped, and the floors stripped up and everything after about nearly two weeks to do that. Then after that the next week of clean up was in our yard, and it was going over and over our basement with pressure sprayers, and things. Now HUD said they would do that but they never showed up. They never came in fact they told us we would get minimal repairs from them too. They brought over forty sheets of sheetrock one day and stacked it there and left and they never came back. So that what we got form HUD was forty sheets of sheetrock, and in the process of carrying it in they broke our light fixture. I remember after we got the water out, and there was a lot of mud and we had to clean out the furniture. Our furniture downstairs was so saturated that is was unmovable. I remember the day my two friends and I got my big ax and went downstairs and chopped my new couch up into pieces.

RW: You had to literally chop it up to get it out?

BY: We chopped it up into about eight pieces with that ax because we just couldn’t get it out it was too heavy with water and mud. Then we chopped up our rocking chair, into three pieces and carried it out. The mattresses were unbelievable, carrying those out. All our children’s bedrooms were in the basement. The mattresses were just awfully heavy to carry out it took a lot of effort, and the food storage was hard to carry out. Our freezer downstairs, it was ruined. Our washing machine had, for some reason floated around the
bathroom, and like I told earlier it had knocked out one wall, then it had gone over and knocked out our shower, and in coming down it had hit our toilet and shattered our toilet. Water closet as HUD people called it, when they came looking around. The washing machine had really created havoc in the bathroom downstairs. My books were floating all over the basement, three thousand volumes of books floating around that basement. It’s hard to even imagine what it was like. We filled up tow pickup loads completely full of just books, just chucking hunks of books out the window. One of the guys would stand out there and he would pick them up and put them in the truck. And we filled the pickup completely full twice. I had such things as the Journal of Discourses, and all of the Church History books, and every church book that I could possibly get in the last fifteen years, I had down there. History collections, and literary collections, being a writer and a historian I love to collect old books and I had just unreal amounts of books, and they were gone. All my children’s clothes were downstairs in their closets just ruined. Some of the clothes we were able to wash and save, but it stained everything that wasn’t a dark color, so that you couldn’t wear it again, at least not for anything good. I remember, looking in my daughter’s closet, in fact I have a picture of it, looking at her dresses hanging there just covered with mud and straw. In my painting room, downstairs where I have my studio, I remember I cleaned out the clothes closet, in there, and on a nail where I had all my new brushes hanging, there was not a new brush but hanging on that nail was a pair of brand new men’s socks, on it’s plastic hook like you’d pick a pair of socks up in a store. I thought that was quite interesting, we had a dead fish down there that we found. In our backyard was a gigantic cow that they didn’t get out until nearly Thursday, and it was swollen so big, that I was afraid it was going to rupture, before they came and got it. But it was really close. I remember the first night after I had waded down into the basement that was Monday night. I was so dirty, of course being in that mucky water all afternoon, I was freezing. It was snowing outside; it snowed on Monday June the seventh. It was cold and I was cold and we didn’t have any heat inside the house, and in our little camper trailer we had no water, except that five gallon can, because it’s not designed with a shower or anything. It’s just a fold out trailer. I was so dirty and I had to get clean, there was no hot water but we did have running cold water. So I remember going into the bathroom and kneeling down in the bathtub, cause we didn’t have a shower upstairs, and I knelt there in the bathtub and took a bath in just plain cold water and it was snowing outside, and some of our window’s were broken, and I tell you, I think about that and I wonder how in the world. Yet at the time I thought it is so good to get clean. There wasn’t any electricity, there was no power, the only light we had was, I found my Coleman lantern, I’d had left it in my trailer instead of putting it in the basement. So we used the Coleman lantern for light, and took a bath in that cold water. And thought gosh it feels good to get clean. There wasn’t a time that I was warm for the first week, because it was raining and snowing that whole week after the flood. It was just always cold, I felt badly after the first few days that I hadn’t taken advantage of the opportunity to get housing up at Ricks College were I could have had a warm shower. But we did go up there to get warm food and for breakfast and lunch and then again at supper we did get warm because we’d be up to the College. But we didn’t even have any propane even in our camper at first, and there wasn’t anybody around that could get it, so it was over a week before we got down to Idaho Falls where we could get our propane can filled. So we could have a stove in the camper.
RW: You did mention that you did go up to Ricks College for meals and that. How do you feel it was handled?

BY: I thought it was handled really well and I was surely glad they had it, I’d have been awful hungry because the food that I was able to get out of the basement, in the short time I felt I had when I was doing it, was not adequate, and even if it had been adequate, we had no place to prepare it. There was no place where we could cook, so I was really glad that the college was there. The problem that I had and I didn’t know it at the time was I was struggling with the beginnings of sugar diabetes. The shock of the flood probably activated that; the meals were really high, high carbohydrates, and high, high sugar content meals. Before the summer was over I was intensely sick and I didn’t even know why. I think that it was aggravated by the types of food that were prepared up there. Then they were forever handing out bottles of soda pop, or cans of soda pop, for people to drink. That’s good because there wasn’t water, but there’s sugar. I really had problems with it; you bet I did, without realizing what the problem was.

RW: Blaine you mentioned that you were a member of a Bishopric—what ward?

BY: Fifth ward.

RW: Rexburg Fifth Ward. Can you tell us a little bit about your neighbors, how they came through it or didn’t come through it, and some of the problems they had.

BY: I don’t know the neighbors, had about the same kind of problems that we did. Two of them didn’t get it on their main floor, the rest of them did. The neighbor that was the hardest hit was Doctor Peterson, because he had to much to get hit, his house went down three levels underground, and it was all ruined. It was all storage for the golden living center. So they were really hit hard and they spent a lot longer than we did cleaning up. Simply because they had so much more, and we diverted lots of crews of people to help them. Our other neighbors, Carters on one side, didn’t have any men in the family, so there were all ladies cleaning up, there’s a divorce there. Her husband did come over and help a little bit then he broke his arm. So he didn’t get to do very much. That was a lot of ladies bucketing mud, so we tried to divert crews in there. And that was basically the way it went. Then we had one neighbor who didn’t want any help, they told us they wouldn’t, then after it was all over they were bitter because we didn’t give them any. There were a lot of feelings that were caused by the cleanup. Yet the people that came in were just real fine about it.

RW: I know of several wards throughout the church, in the Utah, Idaho area; they took different days to come up. How were the crews split up—to a stake?

BY: No, they were kinda; I guess there was a crew of north Rexburg people that dispersed them for their stake, out here at the North Stake Center. Then we met at the Third and Ninth Ward church for the Rexburg and Rexburg East Stakes. The bishop would send a representative there every morning and we would be there by about seven. Then starting about seven-thirty here’d come the bus loads of people, and they would
come in all the way from seven-thirty to nine-thirty. And we would just stand there and the people who were dispersing them would say how many do you need, and I’d say I can use fifty or I can use seventy-five or two hundred or whatever. They would divert me that many men and I would take them up to our chapel where the Bishop and the other councilor were and we would disperse them from there around to the various homes in the ward. Then they would spend the day working in the ward. For the first week or two, in fact for the first at least two weeks of these cleanup crews all we did was shovel mud. Everyday and that what there was and I just waded around in people’s basements directing them where to go and everything and felt frustrated that I wasn’t home helping my wife.

RW: When you were out kind of directing these cleanup crews, it kind of left your wife alone to clean up your home. How much help did she have?

BY: My mom and dad, and my uncle and my brother-in-law came up. They stayed with us for nearly a week and worked with her for that week. Then I mentioned earlier that a lady came over and helped her, then a guy came and helped us paint our kitchen. Then some friends now and then, I think that three different days friends from various areas came up, came specifically to work with us.

RW: That kind of relieved you.

BY: Yeah I was real happy that it happened and our home got cleaned up a lot faster than a lot of them did. My dad, uncle, and my cousin, and my brother-in-law really, really worked hard. Then those two seminary teachers that I was with it was fun to watch them, they would get right in and swim in it. They worked so hard. That was good because I was so discouraged by then that it was real hard for me to force myself to want to do anything.

RW: It would be kind of hard to work with the people around like you were, with all the people what were hit, instead of just worrying about your situation. You mentioned that you became discouraged, was that kind of the frustration of the whole thing?

BY: I think that a lot of the discouragement though was caused by this sugar thing in my blood. That one of the tendencies of it is to get really discouraged. The other thing, I’m sure part of it was frustration, part of it was the fact that everything was ruined, I could have moved to Utah in a pickup truck and had room to spare, after that flood and you realized that the things you had didn’t mean much because you didn’t have them anymore. At the time we didn’t know if there was going to be any federal reimbursement. We wondered how we’d do it really.

RW: Did you attend the meeting, I believe it was the Sunday after the flood, with President Kimball, can you tell us a little about that?

BY: I remember it was really funny to go into the meeting because, personally I was wearing my rubber boots and my Levis, and an old dirty coat which is all I had. I
remember looking at the ladies that were coming in, and usually go to meet with the Prophet you dress very, very well, and nobody was dressed very well. It was quite interesting ladies were coming in cut-offs and Levis, and everything else or whatever they happened to have. Hopefully it was clean it didn’t matter much what it looked like. I was impressed with he and Elder Packer and the things they said. The one thing Elder Packer said that has remained with me, he said “steady as she goes this is going to be a long road, just relax and take it easy.” So Kathy and I and from then on tried every night to make sure that we had quit by about six o’clock, or maybe seven, sometime between six and seven just because we knew that we would have to do it all the next day. We just had to relax; you just couldn’t work all the time.

RW: Now Blaine, you said relax, was there anything to do?

BY: Oh yeah, we tried about…one night we took off and went to Idaho Falls, McDonalds had just closed, so we went up and banged on the door, we told them we were flood victims and we wanted a Big Mac, they opened up the doors and they wouldn’t let us pay for them either. They just gave each of us a Big Mac and said no we don’t want to charge you. So we did that one night. Then we went to Rigby and washed clothes. About twice a week because of course we had no washing facilities up here. So that is where we would spend two evening a week was in Rigby trying to wash up those filthy clothes we had. I remember there was a couple nights that we just went to bed we were so beat, before it was dark or anything we just crawled into the trailer and went to sleep.

RW: But there wasn’t any real recreation, so it was more just get out of the area and get away from what was happening.

BY: It felt so fun to go to Rigby because things were normal. We couldn’t imagine, that place lived the way they always had, because it was so bad where we were. That was one of the exciting things when we went to Utah to see the kids, it was so neat because the lawns were green and no mud, and that was impressive.

RW: Let’s go on with this, you mentioned that you went down and see your kids in Utah, how long was before you did go down and see your kids?

BY: I can’t remember if it was two or three weeks before we first got away. Then we went twice after that. I really can’t remember, it was two or three weeks after we did it. Then right in the middle of it, we had just got the upstairs livable, we had to leave and go back to New York to conduct a Church History tour, for two weeks. So we had to send the kids away again, and we had just got them back, that was at the end of July, when we did that. But we had at that point had our upstairs back to the point that it was livable. We spent all summer and fall after the kids got home with the children all six of them in one bedroom and us in the other one. So it was a fairly crowded situation. I remember one thing we thought we saved our television, that is one of the things I did bring upstairs. We had just bought a new color TV and I carried it upstairs, or somebody stopped in and said hey let’s take your TV upstairs and I said ok. We carried it up and it
was one of those early American models and it’s up on legs. It was a big twenty-five inch console we put it on the kitchen floor. When the flood water came the water went right up to the bottom of that thing and then went back down. I thought boy we saved the TV and I was really tickled. About a week later when we had electricity back I finally got around one night to plugging in the TV. I had an antenna wire just hanging there so I hooked it up. The TV worked beautifully for about fifteen minutes then I noticed there was a funny yellow light flickering on the walls, behind it. Pretty quick I could smell smoke and the darn TV caught on fire inside. It burned clear up and I almost burned my house down trying to get that TV out of there. I had a friend over in Sugar City and I was over there and he was burning trash and the wind shifted and his house caught on fire. We had to call the Fire Department to get it out because we had no water there. That was just after he had started to rebuild his house.

RW: How long was it before you got electricity?

BY: I don’t remember, but it was about a week. Something to that effect. We always had running water, that one thing we always had but they kept telling us it was contaminated, yet I took baths all the time, cold but they were baths. After we got electricity then we turned on [the] stove and we could heat water on the stove. That was such a relief to take a warm bath, I remember thinking how exciting that was to take a warm bath and then when we finally did get a hot water heater back in the basement, I couldn’t believe that was such a luxury. To have a hot water heater that made your water hot quickly I reverted mentally to the basics, so did Kathy so did the other people I talked to.

RW: It was kind of a case of all of a sudden you’re back to the mountain days where it felt good to take a bath even if it was ice cold.

BY: That’s right, that is just the way it was, it was fast.

RW: No lights you probably…

BY: Lit my Coleman lantern.

RW: When you did get the electricity it was nice to be able to flip the light switch and have them come on.

BY: Oh yeah, that was neat. That took a while to do that. It’s hard to remember everything that I felt and thought about. I’ve tried to write some of it down and I can’t do it. I think it was such a bad experience, in ways that I suppressed it mentally, and it’s just not there any more. It may come back to me sometime.

RW: Now I have to ask the ultimate question, what did you think about when they were building the dam, which took several years, did you have any feelings about the dam one way or another?
BY: No.

RW: It just kind of out of your…

BY: I used to take the kids up there and we’d look at it. I never did think about it breaking. I’ve lived under a dam most of my life, I lived in Provo under Deer Creek Dam and I never thought about it. I’ve thought a lot about since, and if they want to build a dam up here that’s fine but I won’t be here. When I move to Utah I’m not going to buy a home under the dam. I’m going to make sure that it is in an area above water level. Not because I think the dam will break but because I’m tired of thinking about that problem.

RW: Have you thought about what would happen now if Palisades or one of those go?

BY: Oh yeah, I’ve thought about it. I’ve been through it once, I can go through it again if I have to, I’ve learned how now.

RW: You got the experience down.

BY: Yeah, it is something I don’t worry very much about. I would prefer not to be in that situation; if I have a choice if I don’t have a choice neither will anybody else.

RW: You’re moving to Utah, but that is a job related move isn’t it?

BY: Right, I’ve been transferred.

RW: You’re moving down there with your job, it’s not because of the flood you’re packing up and moving.

BY: No we’ve been transferred, otherwise I’d stay right here, our home is fixed up now and it’s nice. It’s just one of those things.

RW: Did you see anything unusual during the flood that you can think about?

BY: I didn’t see anything unusual?

RW: What I mean is…I had you describe the lead edge of the water, what you seen. Did you see any houses floating by?

BY: Not at that point, but after I was up on the hill of course I watched houses floating down the roads, things like that. Nothing spectacular at all. I watched the house from the corner float down into Smith Park. I watched a trailer house float by, in fact I watched a lot of trailer houses float by. Then I watched a grain bin float by and I was impressed by that. One of those big metal grain storage bins, and it floated for a long ways. I thought that was really funny, to see that going. I watched a man’s basement filling with water and I knew they weren’t in town and I felt so sorry for them. Because they were away and when they got back that stuff was all down in there. It literally poured into his
basement for hours. I watched it, it took hours to fill that basement, it was a home on Fourth South right on the edge of the flood, the house next door didn’t get touched. The edge of the water came to right there then just poured and poured into his basement. You could hear it splash and gurgle, and every once in a while you could hear something smash and shatter down in there. Someone said, “Just think, that’s what is happening at your house.” I thought, I don’t think so, mine is too high.

RW: Thinking back over the thing, would you have done anything different, say when you first heard about it?

BY: A little but not very much, with the experience I have now, I wouldn’t waste time running back and forth to the hill, I’d be very careful to get certain things that have high priority, up out of the road, just so I could take care of them. But at the time nobody knew that, there was no way you could know that, because the way the radio announcers were screaming get out, get out. Abandon everything, just run; I thought that it must be right here.

RW: So it was kind of the impression the radio people gave you then, that made you think you don’t have time?

BY: That’s right, they were sounding very panicky on the radio and for those people that live in the northern end of the county that were listening to the radio, it would have been an accurate thing to tell them. But the guy just didn’t differentiate as I heard it. I didn’t hear and differentiation.

RW: Now let’s put it in the context of this could happen again, and if it did. You say you have priorities, of course your family is the top priority, how would you change what you did?

BY: I would save things that belong to my children, because they were left totally with nothing. The kids were hurt worse than we were, they had nothing of their own. They didn’t have any clothes, all of their school things, all of their toys, all the things that help them relate to the world because they had something that was theirs. I didn’t even think of the children’s things when the flood was coming, I honestly didn’t, I feel real badly that I didn’t. That’s the main thing I would do differently. I would get things that belong to the kids.

RW: This has been an oral history, I’m Reed Williams. We’ve been talking to Blaine Yorgason. We would like to thank him for his time.